

Social Media Marketing Strategy

CASE: Art of Celebrations

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<p>This is a product oriented thesis that aims to create a social media marketing strategy for a Canadian event planning and design firm Art of Celebrations. The goal was to create an action plan in order to further differentiate the commissioning company from others alike in the highly competitive event and wedding planning industry in Toronto.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of this thesis covers marketing, social media marketing, the brand image and the main social media channels for the commissioning party: Instagram, Pinterest and Facebook.</p> <p>The author decided on Quantitative Research Method in order to gain understanding of the niche group's behaviour on social media. The research was conducted to Finnish brides' and the answers validated with a questionnaire to Canadians about their social media behaviour. The findings from the two researches supported each other.</p> <p>Social Media Marketing Strategy was made based on the theory and the research and the strategy is delivered in a handbook form. It has been customized to fit the needs of the commissioning company.</p> <p>The project began March 2016 and was finalized in November of the same year.</p>	
Keywords Social Media, Marketing, Brand Image, Event marketing	

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1 Introduction

This thesis is commissioned by Art of Celebrations, a wedding and event planning firm based in Mississauga, Ontario. They were looking for ways to reach new customers for the least amount of money. While they use social media on weekly basis and have profiles on many channels, they were not getting enough out of it. A Social Media Marketing Strategy was agreed to be the best approach to low-cost, if not free, marketing platform.

Art of Celebrations began as Flower Parade, a flower shop and a florist for weddings. After a while the co-owner of Flower Parade, Roxy Zapala, who graduated as an interior designer, decided to take things further and founded Art of Celebrations, here on referred as AOC. AOC and Flower Parade share an office space within the flower shop and Flower Parade directs all their event florist inquiries to AOC. Since AOC has their office and showroom within the Flower Parade flower shop they divide the work so that AOC handles everything wedding and event related and Flower Parade takes care of the daily flower shop customers. Flower Parade employees have the know-how when it comes to flowers so they do the wedding bouquets, arrangements and other flower decorations that are needed by AOC. AOC has also founded a separate online flower shop called AOC Flowers.

AOC has extensive experience in every aspect of events. Having first worked as a florist and having interior designers on their team AOC has a unique point of view when it comes to planning the events. AOC offers a wide range of options when it comes to event design, event planning and event coordination. They customize every package so that suits the client's needs and wants the best. The customer can choose anything from full or partial event planning to month-of or day-of coordination. AOC also offers concept development and 3D renderings.

AOC is a part of "The Wedlux Glitterati" community. It is an exclusive community for the vendors of Canadian wedding industry, run by one of the country's leading wedding magazines, Wedlux. In order to be featured in Wedlux magazine and the magazine's website and social media, the company has to be either recommended to Wedlux or ask for a review. In order for a wedding to be published in Wedlux it has to be unique and not be submitted to any other publication or blog. In addition to being featured on the Wedlux site and having their advertisement on the printed issue of the magazine every month, AOC has collaborated with other Glitterati vendors for photoshoots for the magazine and their weddings have been published in the magazine.

1.1.1 Thesis objectives

The Toronto wedding and event industry is highly competitive and AOC is in need of a social media marketing plan that will help it differentiate itself from their competitors. They do not have the resources to run large marketing campaign, but are looking for ways to reach new customers. The aim is to develop an action plan that will help the commissioning company increase both brand awareness and brand recognition with free social media marketing. The final product of this thesis will be a social media marketing strategy handbook that will guide the commissioning company in their day-to-day life to build a stronger brand online and to turn customers into promoters.

1.1.2 Project Plan

The Matrix below shows project objective, tasks, implementation and outcome.

Project objective	Project task	Implementation	Outcome
Social Media Marketing Strategy	Social Media Marketing background research	Desktop study	Theoretical Framework
	Sample population interviews	1 on 1 interviews	Qualitative Research
	Strategy establishment	Analysis of Research and desktop study	Final product as a handbook
	Project evaluation	Feedback	

1.1.3 Demarcation

This thesis will only concentrate on AOC's own social media channels. The focus is on free social media marketing methods on the top three channels: Instagram, Pinterest and Facebook. The final product will contain recommendations on how to improve AOC's social media sites in order to achieve the goals set in section 1.1.2, yet it will not include any marketing materials or actual posts. Additionally, as AOC has a SEO company that also handles AOC's website, this thesis is not going to explore Search Engine Optimizing and will comment the website only regarding social media.

1.1.4 Key concepts

Social Media:

The term Social Media refers to all online communication platforms that rely on sharing content and communication, such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn etc. (Whatis.com 2016)

Social Media Marketing(SMM):

The concept of Social Media Marketing indicates to the actions needed in order to gain interaction and followers to a company's social media channels. (Search Engine Land 2016)

Brand:

“Brand” is something (logo, slogan etc.) that makes the product or service different and unique from others alike. (Investopedia 2016)

Brand Image:

This term describes what the consumer thinks of the brand, in other words; what kind of an image do consumers have of the brand (Investopedia 2016)

Brand Awareness:

The term Brand Awareness is used when describing the changes of consumers identifying product or service. (Investopedia 2016)

2 Marketing, Brand Image and Social Media

The theoretical Framework of this thesis includes the marketing theories relevant to Social Media Marketing and the commissioning company and looks into how social media affects the brand image. The final part of this chapter goes through the social media channels most vital to the commissioning company.

2.1 Inbound Marketing

Instead of fighting for the attention of consumers, the point of inbound marketing is to deliver possible customer straight to you. By creating and sharing specifically designed content, inbound keeps the customers coming back for more.

Your marketing will become significant and not interruptive if you publish the right content in the right place at the right time. The right place is where your target customer is spending time, the right time makes your marketing significant to the ideal customer and content is what keeps the Inbound Methodology afloat. In short, the goal of inbound marketing is to make the customer trust and like you until they want to buy the product or service offered.



Figure 1 HubSpot 2016

The four actions (Attract, Convert, Close and Delight) on top of the figure are what is needed from the company to ensure to keep visitors, leads, customers and promoters. The tools the companies use to attain those actions are listed on the bottom; under the action they are first used. (HubSpot 2016)

The first part of the figure 1 (Attract) shows how the content (Blogs, SEO, pages, social publishing) creates the right traffic on the site. The right traffic or the right people are the ideal customers, the ones who will evolve from strangers and visitors into leads and customers. (HubSpot 2016)

The second stage (Convert) shows how by collecting contact information the company can change the visitors into leads. This can be done by for example downloadable content like eBooks or Webinar's. The main idea is to give something back when the visitor gives their contact information. (HubSpot 2016)

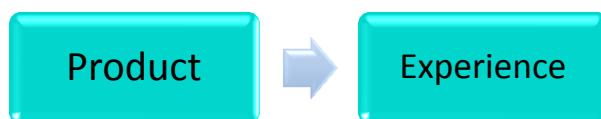
In the next phase (Close) you have attained the right visitor and leads and now you need to change those into actual customers. Closing tools are for example email, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), marketing automation and closed-loop reporting. (HubSpot 2016)

Final step (Delight) is to keep customers engaged and to delight them, maybe even transform their customer base into promoters. The delight tools cover things like surveys, social monitoring, smart texts and smart calls-to-action. (HubSpot 2016)

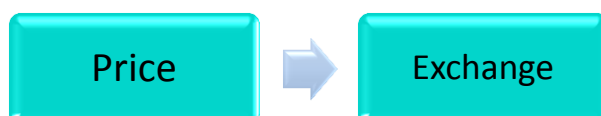
Expert Journal of Marketing introduced the concept of Digital Inbound Marketing in 2015. While traditional marketing focuses on finding as many customers as possible and aims to increase sales, the focus of Digital Inbound Marketing is to get found by the right kind of consumers and aims to establish relationships with them. Digital Inbound Marketing uses, as the name suggests, non-traditional online methods like blogs, Ebooks, YouTube videos, SEO and different social media channels instead of cold calling, TV or print ads and email lists. (Opreana, Vinerean, 2015)

2.2 4 E's of Marketing

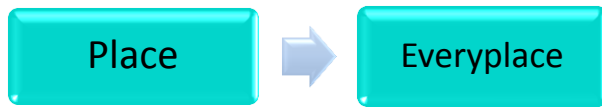
What used to be the 4 P's of marketing are now considered as the 4 E's of marketing:



The world of sales is not as black and white as it used to be; you do not give money and receive a product. Consumers buying behaviour is heavily influenced by the values of the brand that they are buying a product from, the values the brand represents.



In today's customer driven world, you need to understand the value and the needs of the customer: what is the profit that the customer brings to you and what do they need in exchange. To put it simply: You are giving something in return for something else.



As there is no more a specific place for a product to be bought from, the product or the brand should be accessible and connected anywhere anytime.



With the winds of sales changed from a straight forward approach, promotion is no longer black and white either. Consumers look for brand experiences, they want to know the mission of the brand and share their findings to others.

(Fetherstonhough, 2009)

AOC's four E's are as follows:

Experience – The experience AOC offers is support on the clients wedding planning journey. If needed, AOC will be there every step of the way to ensure the most comfortable planning process and to bring the clients' visions to live.

Exchange – AOC is providing a service of planning and/or coordinating the event in exchange of the customers to promote the company and the work that AOC does.

Everyplace – This can be seen as their social media presence. Through social media, AOC is accessible everywhere and anytime.

Evangelism – The values AOC conveys are experience, knowledge and uniqueness. AOC recently changed its slogan from "Unparalleled Events, Happy Brides" to "Unparalleled Events, Happy Couples" in order to not to exclude same sex couples.

2.3 Event marketing

Marketing an event is separated into 5 different stages:

Pre event



- This stage includes:

- Social media announcement to create momentum and following to your event and hashtag
- Blog post to explain to people why the event is being held
- Partner outreach to gain media/social media partners and collaborators so they can advertise your event

Event launch



- This stage includes:

- Launch email or invite email is the most effective way to gain ticket sales within your community
- Press Release
- Second blog post on the advantages of dropping in at your event and the schedule
- While the event is at its high, this is the time to inquire marketing help from your partners

Day-to-day



- This stage includes:

- Regular email, blogging and social media should be used to keep your event on people's minds
- Early bird discount
- Paid promotion to gain more attendees

Last call



- This stage includes:

- Final blast on email, blog and social media channels
- Reaching an influencer in your business might be a good way to fill the last places and get that extra promo
- Phone call could be the way to tie up some loose ends, for example someone pre-registered but never bought a ticket

Day of event! (Walker 2015)

As AOC is a company that provides event planning and design production services with the main focus on weddings and does not create the events themselves, the above theory on event marketing cannot be implemented as straight forward. The five stages need to be adapted to fit AOC's needs;

Pre event – For AOC this is the time to keep notes of a unique wedding and the planning that leads up to that, in case it should become a blog post or a magazine submission. This is also the time to post about previous weddings.

Event launch – As AOC does not organize the events themselves and contributes more behind the scenes of events, the launch of an event is nothing but posting that they are excited to be a part of that upcoming event. Regarding weddings, this stage can be inter-

puted as the time invitations get sent out. As AOC helps to come up with the themes of the wedding and the wedding invitations, this is the time to post about the unique invitations they have created together with the printers, in order to give ideas for future brides.

Day-to-day – This is the stage AOC is in at all times. They should be blogging and posting on their social media site regularly in order to be in the top of peoples' minds when they start looking for a wedding/event planner.

Final call – The last stage means creating buzz for the upcoming event. It includes that AOC posts about the preparations for the event and show how excited they are about their work.

While they sometimes collaborate with other vendor on photoshoots, AOC's marketing and social media materials come from the events and the weddings themselves. This makes the day of the event and the days right after the event important for AOC. It is crucial to post about the event when it is happening as well as afterwards.

2.4 Social Media Marketing

“Social Media is what great marketing has always been: Word-of-Mouth”

Chris Le'cand-Harwood

Head of Social media

Havas People

Social media has become the platform for normal people to get their voices heard. Social Media Marketing (SMM) is similar to offline marketing methods, such as word-of-mouth marketing. It provides the companies with the means to endorse their brand and develop relationships with consumers. (Saravanakumar & SuganthaLakshmi, 2012)

The most common misconception about social media marketing is that is quick, free of charge and easy. Not many businesses “go viral” overnight. However, there are things you can do to help you get connected with the correct target audience. Start by building relationships with influencer's in your field, liking and sharing their posts will help them to recognize you and your business when approaching them when needed. Next you should find out what social media channels your target group uses and use those channels for your promotion. You should not limit your social media use only to the most popular channels. By understanding the environment of the channel in question your business can thrive on any channel. According to Amy Vernon, when it comes to advertising the con-

tent, you should keep in mind the 90/10 rule: only 10% of what you post should be promotional and the other 90% something else. Lastly, you should consider paying someone else to run your social media channels if you do not have the time yourself. (Parrish 2015)

While blogging and visuals are the most important content for marketers, most of them say they plan to incorporate videos into their marketing in the future as well. Most marketers are still sceptical when it comes to new social media platforms and do not actively seek new channels. While platforms like Snapchat are getting the interest of marketers, social media giants are still preferred communication channels. (Stelzner, 2016)

2.4.1 Benefits of using Social Media for Business

As social media seems to be here to stay, social media use for business is a must. In addition to being a great tool to distribute content easier and in real time, it is the ultimate tool to understanding your customers. It gives insight to what your competitors do at the same time as you boost your website movement and climb up on the search rankings. Social media is a less expensive way to advertise your business than traditional advertising, with the added bonus of delivering the message straight to your niche group. You are able to boost the brand recognition, connect with your customers and maintain the relationships through social media. (Copp 2016)

According to the 2016 Social Media Marketing Industry Report, the leading benefits of using social media for marketing are increasing exposure and traffic, developing loyal fans and gaining marketplace insight. (Stelzner, 2016)

2.4.2 Risks of using Social Media for Business

While social media has many benefits, it does not come without any risks. The disaster can hit in a matter of seconds. The top 3 risks when using social media for your business are the following:

1. Reputation management: It is important not to post anything controversial to social media, since something that seemed funny may blow up and cause bad reputation and the loss of customers
2. Data theft: In order to protect your company from getting hacked, it might be good to use social media management tool that allow employees access the social media site without the need of a password.
3. Privacy issues: While an enthusiastic employee is a good asset, they might be a risk to your company when tweeting or snapping about a secret project. It is im-

portant to establish social media policies to guide your employees to prevent classified information from getting out (Englander 2015)

2.5 The Brand and Social Media

Social media and the brand image go hand in hand. The concept of Brand Image was first introduced in the 1950s and while the definition is often debated, brand image remains a crucial part in marketing (Dodni & Zinkhan, 1990). Business dictionary describes brand image the following way: “The impression in the consumers' mind of a brand's total personality (real and imaginary qualities and shortcomings). “

The Brand Image is not to be confused with Brand Identity. While Brand Image is what the consumer thinks of the brand, Brand Identity is what the brand wants the consumer to view the brand.

Brand Awareness is a key concept when diversifying a company's services and products from others alike as brands that have high Brands Awareness will develop higher sales. A company can easily build Brand Awareness through social media as it is the place where probable customers share their thoughts on the services and products they have used and ask other for opinion of something they are considering investing their money in. (Investopedia 2016)

When it comes to AOC as a brand, their social media pages contradict with their website. While the website shows a global company with a competent team, the social media profiles' give the impression a local, small business run by the owner alone and maybe even someone who is just starting out in the industry.

While the content of the profile might show a professional team that has been doing wedding for years, the problem lies in the profile descriptions of their Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest. The profile descriptions of the three channels are the following:



Figure 2 AOC's Instagram profile

As seen on Figure 2 above, AOC's Instagram profile is not a company profile. While the user name is the name of the company, the name on the profile is the owner, Roxy Zapala and the bio is written from her point of view.



Figure 3 AOC's Twitter Profile

Figure 3 shows the AOC's Twitter profile. The username here is as close to Art of Celebrations' as it can get and the description starts with the company's slogan. However, the description continues mentioning who the owner and the creative director is. While Twitter is not the most useful channel for AOC, it should be used for more than just sharing links of their Instagram pictures in order to be more professional.

Roxy Zapala

3939 Duke of York Blvd, Unit... /
www.artofcelebrations.com
Art of Celebrations is Toronto's finest Event planning & design
production - wedding planning and Party planners Company.
www.artofcelebrations.com

Figure 4 AOC's Pinterest profile

In AOC's Pinterest profile, seen above, the owner is the main attraction and the company is side-lined to be a part of the owner. In this profile, even the address is the owner's apartment and not AOC's.

As the company's name is Art of Celebrations and not tied to the name of the owner, the mention of the owner's name in the profile descriptions is useless. The brand seems to be at a loss of an identity.

2.5.1 Employees' Social Media Channels

The social media channels of the employees' and volunteers' are a great way to spread people's knowledge of your company. Since the employees of AOC are mostly in their 20's or 30's, their friends are most likely getting married soon and are exposed to AOC through their friends social media. However, employee personal social media posts can be a potential threat as well. If the employees do not know what they should avoid leaking

to the outside world or what is appropriate to share, they might endanger the privacy of customers or end up leaking information to competitors. It is important to create common social media use rules within the company to prevent them from sending out classified or wrong information from their personal accounts. (Englander 2016)

Companies like Starbucks have mastered the art of social media when it comes to employees. They encourage their employees to fill their social media feeds with the Starbucks brand. Zappos has a specific Twitter training for its employees.

There are a few key things to remember when building a social media strategy for employees. First and foremost, your employees have to want to post something about the company. Your employees have to have the right followers on social media in order for the message to go through to the target audience. It could also help your employee to build their network at the same time. While it's important for your employees to know what to share, it might be useful to give them a little push from time to time and to have some guidelines on how to address the company online. Sharing should be made easy and simple and lastly, too many posts about the company may sound fishy and untrustworthy to most of their followers. In short; the ideal situation and the aim for social media training is to have an enthusiastic employee with the right kind of social following, who knows what to post and when to post it. (Holmes 2015)

2.6 Social Media Channels

As there are so many different social media applications, this thesis will only concentrate on the ones that are the most important to AOC: Instagram, Pinterest and Facebook. These are the channels that come up the most when discussing weddings with AOC's clients.

2.6.1 Instagram

The year 2016 has been a busy one for Instagram. Firstly, it updated its algorithm earlier this year and it doesn't show the picture's on one's feed in chronological order any more. Now it shows you the pictures it thinks you want to see based on your likes, searches and the pages you follow. Then Instagram launched its new look, completely changing its logo. While it's been making a lot of smaller changes too, like longer videos, a view count on videos, including boomerangs, and adding the possibility to zoom, the most news worthy update happened August 2016 when it launched Instagram Stories. The basic idea is no-

tably similar to Snapchat, as you can now add pictures and videos that show up as your story and are visible for only 24 hours. (Instagram 2016)

In July 2016 Instagram added a possibility to create a business account and while it's not as versatile as other social platform designed business profiles, it is recommended as it gives a small business more possibilities. First of all, it has an added "Contact" button that erases the hassle of "Click the link in profile". The business profile also comes with the possibility of analytics, called Insights, giving you access to information such as reach, impressions and follower information of the past week. However, Insights will only show you the analytics of one post at a time. There is also the added possibility to promote your posts to a set audience, budget and time period.

In order to get the most out of your Instagram page, there are a few things to keep in mind. Firstly, you should link your Instagram to your Facebook page. As a part of Facebook, Instagram posts and other activity are more likely to pop up on other users' feeds. (Sae Koo, 2013)

2.6.2 Pinterest

Pinterest is one of the most unique social media channels. It concentrates more on the visuals and is the place to go to for ideas for recipes and other projects. (Schupbach, 2012) It describes itself as "the world's catalogue of ideas". On it you can choose what interests you and it gives you recommendations, you can then "Pin" the post you'd like to save for later. You have the possibility to create different boards to keep your Pins organized. As a business, you also have the possibility to create promote Pins. Simply put, it's the modernized version of a pin board. (Pinterest, 2016)

Using Pinterest for your business has proven to be rather difficult, since Pinterest is still trying to figure out how to protect copyrights. The best way to secure that the credits comes to you is to watermark your pictures and attach a link to your website. (Schupbach, 2012)

However, when used correctly, Pinterest can increase your website traffic. Take the case of Green Wedding Shoes for example. As their mission is to inspire brides and wedding professionals, focus on Pinterest was fitting. By adding the Save button and the hovering Save button, a button that appears on top of the picture when your mouse is over it, they easily increased their following and Pins. They ensure that their Pins fit their style, can be

seen with every device, are high quality and would rather use single photos instead of a collage. (Campbell, 2016)

2.6.3 Facebook

Facebook, Inc. was founded in 2004 and is currently considered the 5th World's most valuable brand. The brand also owns other social media channels, such as Instagram and WhatsApp (Forbes 2015). According to socialmediaexaminer.com 54% of marketers think Facebook is the most important application in social media. This might be because Facebook was the first to receive the mass popularity; hence it is the most well-known and has the most users.

As it is already a norm that a company has a Facebook presence, many companies use it to market their products. In fact, according to Café Quill, 75% of companies promote their Facebook posts. As a company page you can engage with customer and gain visibility and brand awareness. To build a complete profile, you should have a recognizable profile picture, an appealing cover photo and short yet detailed About section. You should also set up a vanity URL, as the page automatically gives you a number URL. Having a vanity URL, you make your Facebook page shareable and quick to find.

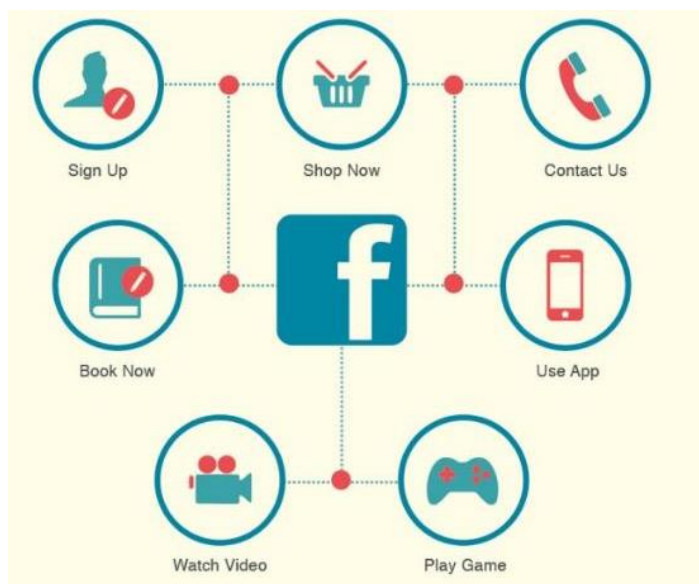


Figure 5 Café Quill

Facebook has seven pre-made Call-to-Action buttons, seen on Figure 2 above. You should utilize the ones that make sense to your business. You have the possibility to Pin your posts on top of page, one at a time. Variety is what matters on social media; it is

what keeps people interested in your page. The top two reasons for Facebook users to unlike a company are posting uninteresting content and posting too much. While it is important to post visuals, keep the possible videos short. (Feygin, 2016)

2.6.4 AOC's Current Social Media Use

AOC currently is only fully active on Instagram and uses Twitter and Facebook mostly only to share the Instagram posts. They have been doing some changes to their website and one of the added features was to add their social media channels on top of the website. According to that, they currently use the following channels: Facebook, Google+, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn, Pinterest and Instagram. However, three out of the seven links on the website do not work. They either link back to the AOC website or an error message appears. Additionally, a quick YouTube search will lead you to their YouTube channel (last active a year ago) that is not represented on the website.

While they do not have any specific marketing strategy for social media at the moment, they do have an idea behind what they post. "I think that beautiful photos of events speak volumes but sometimes it's a good idea to have a photo of the face behind the designs. This way people feel like they already know you" comments the founder and creative director Roxy Zapala.

Instagram is by far AOC's most used social media channel. They post often and share the posts to their other social media sites. As seen on section 2.3, AOC's Instagram bio is told from the perspective of the owner, instead of the company's. While they However, AOC has yet to discover Instagram stories and rarely posts videos or boomerangs.

As many of the AOC brides prepare to a consult appointment by sharing their Pinterest boards or pull it out on their phones during the meeting when discussing some specific thing, there is no doubt that Pinterest is important to AOC and should be utilized in marketing as well. As seen on section 2.3, AOC's Pinterest profile currently looks like someone's personal Pinterest profile instead of a company profile. They have separate boards for Flower Parade and AOC and most of the boards only have a couple of pins. It is clear that AOC is currently inactive on Pinterest.

AOC's Facebook use is currently quite poor. They do not publish any content exclusive to Facebook, but instead mostly just share Instagram posts through the Instagram app. A

quick Facebook search will lead the consumer to a second Facebook page for the same company that was last used December 2015. While the page that AOC now uses is verified, it does not have any reviews like the other one.

3 Case Company Social Media Marketing Strategy Development

This chapter consists of the research used as a method to understand the behaviour of the target audience. It includes the objective of the research, the method chosen to be used, sample population, the qualitative research process and a summary of the results.

3.1 Objectives

The objective of this research is to gain understanding of how to use the social media channels proven to be most useful to AOC in marketing. This thesis aims to produce an effective marketing strategy that will help differentiate AOC in the very competitive Toronto wedding industry and to help gain brand awareness. This research also aims to gain understanding of the niche market behaviour on social media.

3.2 Qualitative Research Method

Snapsurveys.com describes qualitative research method the following way: “Qualitative Research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations”. Qualitative method gives a more in-depth view of how people use social media in general and how a bride uses social media in the wedding planning process. The author chose Qualitative Research Method for this thesis as the objectives were to understand the behaviour of the niche market on social media, to specify what the target group reacts to and to identify the importance of social media to the target group and industry professionals.

3.2.1 Sample Population

The research was conducted in Finland. Due to unforeseen issues the author was unable to conduct interviews with current and previous customers of AOC in Canada. It was decided to identify the population sampling group of this research within the commissioning company's target group. It was specified as follows: Couples currently planning their wedding, couples that had their wedding within a year and industry professionals. As the Finnish brides' are socially comparable to their Canadian counterparts the reliability of the results was not compromised. Some parts of social media behaviour were confirmed with an online research targeted to Canadians.

The interviewees were chosen from a Finnish Facebook group “Häät2016”, which translates to “Weddings2016”, a community for those Finnish brides, grooms, maids of hon-

ours, best men and others who are planning or having their wedding in 2016 and vendors of the Finnish wedding industry. All together five people were interviewed; four brides, which of whom one owns a bridal gown atelier and one has worked in the industry, and one who owns a wedding planning business in Helsinki Area.

3.2.2 Questions

As the aim was to see the behaviour models on social media, both in general and as part of wedding planning, and to see how a small business uses its social media in the industry. The questions were divided into three categories: first were general questions about the interviewees social media habits, second were the questions related specifically to social media's role with weddings and wedding planning and the last category was about business' social media. The interviews were all conducted in Finnish, since all of the participants are Finnish, and in a place that the interviewee decided in order to make them comfortable.

The questions here are divided into three categories and then into sub-groups in order to explain why those questions were chosen and what the author aimed to achieve by these questions.

Questions 1 to 10: Social media use in general

1. *What social media channels do you use?*
2. *What are the most important channels for you? /What channels do you use the most?*

Starting off with the basics, the aim of these is simple: to see what channels the brides' are active on, what is the most popular channel among them and what channel they feel like is the most important to them at this stage of their life.

3. *When was the last time you reacted to something? How?*
4. *What about that post made you react?*

These two questions tap into the brides' behavioural patterns on social media and give a closer look on how much they use social media in their personal lives. The questions aim to find out what makes a person react to something on social media and whether there are any clear patterns of behaviour.

5. *What makes you like or follow a page on social media?*
6. *What makes you recommend a page to follow on social media?*
7. *What makes or would make you unlike or unfollow a page on social media?*

Questions 5 to 7 are all about inbound marketing; how to turn strangers into customers and promoters. Questions 5 and 6 were to find out if there are any patterns to what makes one interested enough to like or follow a company's social media and to promote a page (and therefore the company) to somebody. Question number 7 is all about CRM. While it is important to gain new followers and customers, it is as important to keep the ones' you already have. This was to see what the company needs to do in order to stay relevant to current and past customers.

8. *How much time do you spend on social media?*

9. *Do you use social media clearly more in the AM or in the PM?*

These question aim to see how familiar the interviewee is with social media and to see whether they have noticed that their social media use is focused on a specific time of the day.

10. *Is it important whether the website/blog/social media channel is optimized for a smartphone?*

As smartphone's and tablets are getting increasingly popular so does the importance of websites, blogs and social media sites. The final question in this category was to see whether smartphone optimizing is important to this specific niche market.

Questions 11 to 21: Wedding planning and social media

11. *Do you follow many wedding related pages on social media?*

Question number 11 aims to see how many wedding industry social media sites the brides' actually use and follow.

12. *Where did you find inspiration for your wedding? (Ex. Magazines, social media)*

13. *To what part of our wedding did you look inspiration for? (theme, food, program, vendors)*

14. *How long before the wedding did you start following wedding related pages?*

These question focus on the beginning of the wedding planning process. They aim to see what do the brides' look inspiration for and where. The goal was to find out what does a new bride look for and how to get them pay attention to your profile.

15. *What social media channels have you used specifically for the wedding?*

16. *Is there one channel specifically that rose above other regarding the wedding?*

Questions 15 and 16 aimed to see what the most important channels are during the wedding planning process. This helps to focus the social media marketing efforts to those channels and therefore reach more potential clients.

17. *How much would you say you used social media in the wedding planning process?*
18. *Do you believe that social media has helped you during the wedding planning process?*
19. *How would you evaluate the importance of social media during the wedding planning process?*

Questions 17 to 19 are to define the role and relevance of social media while planning a wedding.

20. *Do you have a wedding hashtag?*

This question was meant to see the popularity of wedding hashtags and the brides' take on them.

21. *Did you notice you were planning your wedding especially more during a specific time of day or week? (AM or PM, during the week or during the weekend?)*

This question is here to see what time of the day/week to post in order to optimize the reachability of the posts.

Questions 21 to 39: Wedding industry

22. *Which social media channels does your company use? Why these?*
23. *What is the main purpose your company has a social media presence?*
24. *What is the most important social media channel to your company?*
25. *Have you defined your target market on social media somehow?*

The wedding industry related questions start with the basics in order to see what channels the professional has decided to put their efforts into, to differentiate the channel they have found the most efficient and whether they have thought about the target group specifically for social media and use that information to their benefit.

26. *Have you defined your style on different social media channels?*
27. *What is your policy regarding pictures? Do you only use your own pictures or do you use pictures others have taken as well?*
28. *How do you apply the protection of personal data in your posts?*

Questions 26 to 28 are about the behaviour of the industry professional on social media. The questions aimed to see what the professional has proven to be the most effective style of post and the best approach in regards to privacy and copyright through trial and error.

29. *What do your followers react the most to? (E.g. Stories, pictures of peoples' faces, pictures of details)*
30. *What is the most important thing when it comes to using hashtags, according to your experience?*
31. *Do you use the same pictures on multiple social media sites?*

These questions are all about the reactions from the followers. Their objective was to identify the characteristics' of valuable post.

32. *What is the most valuable thing about social media to your company?*
33. *What do you like most about social media?*

Questions 32 and 33 examine the role and importance of social media for a small business in a creative field.

34. *Do you consciously apply a strategy regarding the brand and brand recognition on social media?*
35. *How do you use the feedback and visitor data to your benefit on social media?*
36. *Do you keep a private Instagram/Pinterest account separated from your company's pages? Why?*

These questions were based on branding. Their goal was to identify what a small business can do in order to brand itself as a company and not as a person.

37. *Have you noticed more traffic on your social media during a specific time of day, week or year?*
38. *Have you gotten clients through social media?*

Questions 37 and 38 tie together with questions 9 and 21 and the aim was to validate the answer from those two and to optimize the time of the posts in order to gain more exposure to you post.

39. *What golden advice would you give to a small business regarding social media?*

This question was also asked at the end of the interviews with the brides'. The goal was to see what the brides' would want you to notice when using social media and to see what they, maybe unconsciously, pay attention to the most. When asked this from a professional, the aim was to see what their experience in the field tells them you should take into consideration.

3.3 Results

3.3.1 Wedding planning and social media

Three out of the four brides' were asked about their use of social media in general and for wedding related purposes, while one bride was asked all three categories as she owns her own Atelier. The fifth interviewee was asked about the use of social media in the industry as she owns a wedding planning firm.

The interviewees had profiles' on Facebook and Instagram and had at least tried Pinterest sometime during the wedding planning process. At least two of the participants also had a profile on Snapchat, LinkedIn and Twitter. In addition to using all of the mentioned channels, one bride needed a Periscope account for work purposes.

All of the participants had last reacted to a post the day of the interviews. When asked what about those specific posts made them react, the answers all echoed the same. Something about that post hit home. Something about that post was relevant to them at that time. Something about the post somehow connected with them. Something about the post made them feel good.

When it comes to following and liking or unfollowing and unliking a page, the participants were quite unanimous. They will like or follow a page if it was something that they believe in, if the page would provide relevant or new information or out of support to a cause or a friend. At the same time most of the brides said that they would unfollow or unlike a page if the page would spam irrelevant information. Couple mentioned that they would unfollow if the page would share or write racist, sexist or otherwise offensive content.

Two social media channels rose clearly above any of the other: Instagram and Pinterest. One bride pointed out that she liked Pinterest more because it is more private. She said that she would rather pin stuff on there that to like something on Instagram or Facebook as both of the latter shows your friends or followers what you have liked or commented to. She wanted to keep her wedding planning to herself and not share it with all of her social media followers and

While Pinterest got praised a lot during the interviews, one bride had tried it and did not like it. She had worked in a bridal gown shop few years prior to her engagement and through that she had been following the industry trends and inadvertently thinking of what she liked and what she did not. To her the easiness on Instagram, the fact that you did not need to go specifically look for anything and that by following the right pages the ideas

would pop into one's feed together with friends' posts, was what made the channel the best fit for her.

When it came to inspiration and where to look for it, social media was the number one to all of brides. The pattern seemed to be that while all of them had gotten or bought bridal magazines, there was nothing in those magazines that they would not find online. In fact, one bride pointed out that the magazines would only make you look up further information, on whatever it was that caught their eye, online or from social media. One also mentioned that the bridal magazines would mainly have things that were on trend in Finland at the time. The elements that the interviewees were looking inspiration for were mostly the dress and the decorations. One disclosed that she needed inspiration for everything regarding the wedding.

Social media also played a part in vendor selection. One remarked that a post offensive to women photographers on a photographer's personal Facebook profile made her drop him immediately, even though his pictures were nice.

Every single one of the interviewed brides believed that social media was important to them during their wedding planning process. One added that while she would do well without it (due to the fact that she worked in the industry), "it's just fun".

Wedding hashtags were not popular among the interviewees. One bride said that she did not like the fact that an event so private and emotional would be followed by strangers through the hashtag. One of the interviewees mentioned that while she has a lot of followers through her bridal gown studio, her fiancé wanted to remain private. One bride pointed out that they were considering it, yet decided against it since her fiancé did not have a social media presence and a hashtag would not represent them together if he did not have access to the pictures.

Every one of the interviewees said smartphone optimizing was important to them. One added that she does not even like it when a normal website has too much going on and that a clear website does not need to have an extra version for a smartphone as all of the features work well on a smaller screen anyway.

3.3.2 Wedding industry and social media

Both of the participants said that Instagram was clearly important in the business. One had not been able to download it on her phone yet, but said that it was definitely coming soon as she realises the influence of it in the business. She is currently only using Facebook and has a blog connected to her wedding planning company. She said that she uses Facebook ads, but cannot comment on the efficiency of those as her ad agency deals with them. The other participant has Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and a blog. She liked the fact that Instagram gives her exposure in international markets as well and that it was easy to use. While both of them had tried Twitter, neither of them has stuck with it as it was hard to learn and did not give them much back.

Neither of the participants had given much thought to their style of writing on social media. Only one of the interviewees mentioned that she prefers to write close to the way she speaks. However, the other remarked that her social media profiles compliment the image she wants to portray to the public about her company.

Both of the participants had separated their personal social media profiles from their company's profile. One responded saying that she had first had a combined Instagram profile but then wanted to limit the personal photos. She has divided the style of the two profiles so that her personal one has sneak peeks of dresses and pictures of her personal life, while the company's profile only shows complete dresses and other pictures related to her studio. The other mentioned she had thought about separating her Facebook friends into groups of "wedding people" and "non-wedding people", so that could keep her private posts away from those in the industry, but had yet to do that.

They are both very careful not to violate their clients' privacy online. Both mentioned that they will always confirm that they have the right to post a picture of the client in it and one of them said she crops out the faces of the brides' when posting pictures of a dress. They also always ask for a permission to use a photographer's picture and give credit to them. One mentioned that she only posts pictures she has taken on Pinterest.

While observing their followers' behaviour throughout the years, both of the participants reported that people react to wedding photos the best. One claimed that it is clear that people want to see those candid pictures that show emotions of the couple/bride. Both have noticed that their blogs give a boost to their social media pages. While there is not much comments on the blogs anymore, one mentioned that it has gotten her radio inter-

views and the other said told that the Facebook posts that include a link to a new blog posts receive a good amount of reactions.

Neither of the interviewed posted the same pictures on multiple social media channels. In fact, both mentioned they try to steer clear of repeating the pictures and using too many hashtags. One mentioned she prefers to always use the same hashtags in the Instagram pictures.

One of the interviewees had noticed that she gets more followers during the summer wedding season and that there spikes of activity on her social media whenever she has posted a blog post about a unique dress. They both said that evenings during the week is the best time post as their posts get the most reactions during that time of the day. Both of them believe social media is important in the business and have gotten clients through it. One of them even went so far than to say that she get all of her clients from social media.

The two professionals had a few advices to share. The one who owned a wedding planning company reminded to post things that are tasteful and keep in mind privacy policies. The owner of the wedding dress studio encouraged using social media frequently enough and preferably post something once a day.

3.3.3 Validity and the reliability of the results

In addition to interviews in Finland, a small quantitative research about Canadians' general use of social media was conducted in order to validate the answers gotten in from Finns.

The questions about general social media habits were slightly modified to fit the quantitative research style. A question about one's age was added to see if social media behaviour changes according to age and to keep in mind AOC's target group of young adults, since it would be posted out of the AOC's owners personal Facebook and any one of her friends could answer it.

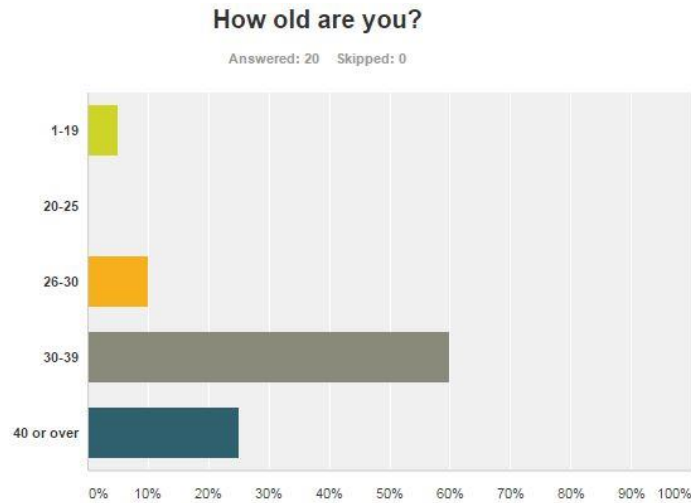


Figure 6 The age division of participants

The question about the participant's age was only asked in the questionnaire, since the demographic of AOC is mainly couples from their mid-twenties and the participants were not brides only. As seen in the Figure 6 above, all except one of the participants were over the age of 25. The fact that 20% of the participants were 40 or over may affect the result some, since the generation has not grown up with social media or smart phones.

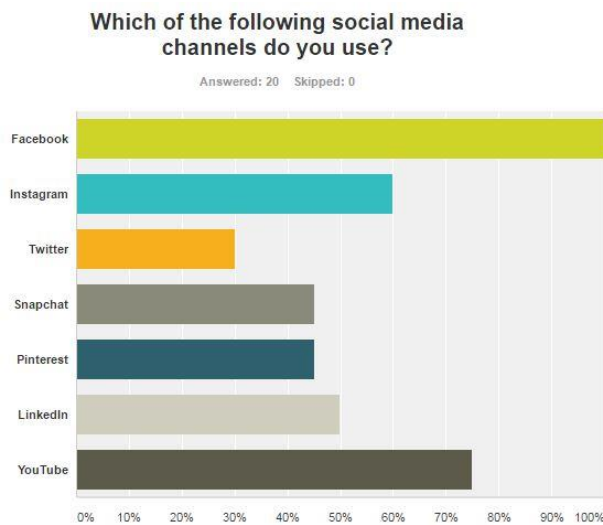


Figure 7 The usage of social media channels participants use

Figure 7 shows the answers to the second question in the survey, what social media channels the participants use. The seven pre-made answers were chosen due to their mass popularity and the participants were also given a choice of "other" and a comment field to answer to. Out of the top three answers, all of the participants have a Facebook profile, 75% have YouTube and 60% use Instagram. LinkedIn takes the 4th place with half of the participants using it, while Snapchat and Pinterest share 45%. The most unused it Twitter, with only 30% of the participants using it. Two of the participants answered WhatsApp, when asked if there are any other social media channels they use.

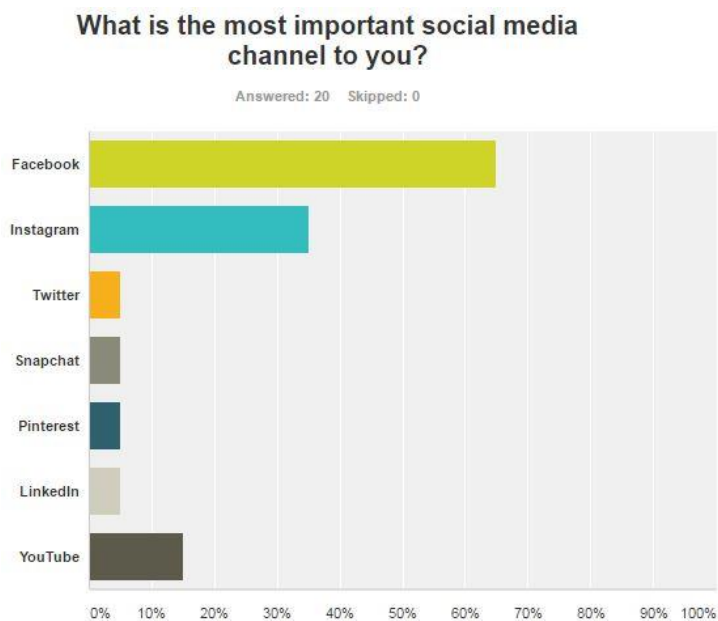


Figure 8 The most important social media channel

The question on Figure 8 above about the most important channel to the participants' is the most revealing question of all. Again, the participants were given an "other, what?" option, with a comment field. As seen above the two most important social media channels clearly are Facebook and Instagram. While YouTube is the most important to 15% of the participants, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, LinkedIn and in the comments WhatsApp only have 5% each.

As well as answering Twitter as their most important one, one of the participants was also confused about the meaning of importance in the question. The participant said that while Twitter is more important for some, Facebook is more important for connecting with personal friends etc. Taking a closer look into the participant's answers, they are the only one to say Twitter is the most important one.

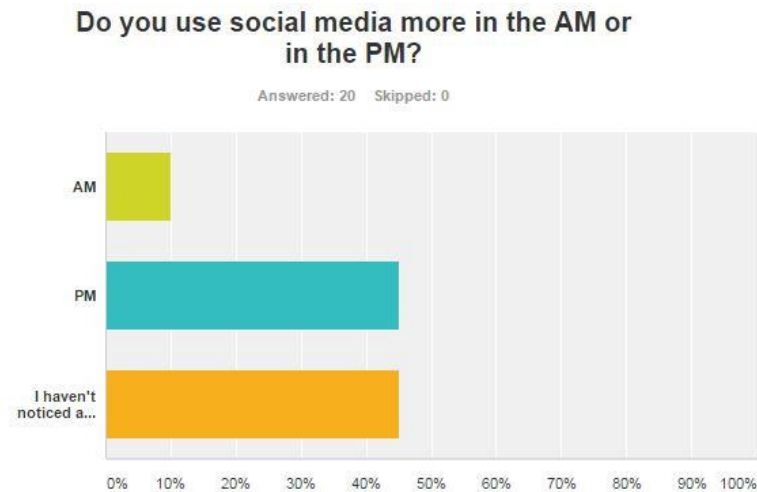


Figure 9 The time of the day spent on social media

This question was to see if there is a way to optimize the amount of people that react to you post by posting in a specific time on the day. The emphasis of social media use is mostly either in the PM or the participants have not noticed a difference. Only 10% of the participants said they use social media more in the mornings.

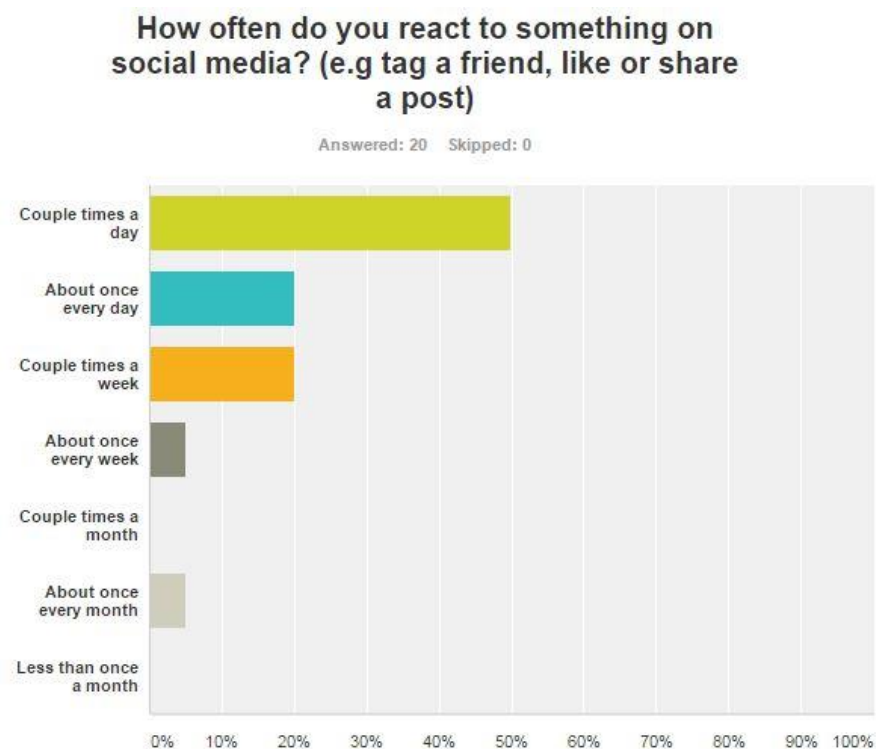


Figure 10 Reacting on social media

Figure 10 shows that most of the participants react to something on social media at least once a day. While 25% of the participants react at least once a week, only 5% reacts to something once a month.

The two other questions were open ended ones, the participants were able to write what they wanted

What makes you like or follow a page on social media?

This question received mostly the same answer from all: It offers something that interests me. Some participants said that the page should provide them with useful information or posts that are fun or funny. Two of the participants mentioned they would like the page if it were run or somehow related to someone they know. One mentioned that they would like nostalgic posts, creative ideas and thought provoking pages.

What would make you unlike or unfollow a page on social media?

With this question, the participants were almost divided in half. While others said that racism, bigotry, violent, degrading, homophobic, abusive or vulgar content would make them lose interest; the others only mentioned too many posts or too many advertising would make them unfollow a page. While others said that if the content would not hold the same values, would go against their own beliefs or post brutal or gruesome pictures they would unlike the page; the others only responded that they would unlike a page if it got too repetitive or they simply would lose interest in it.

3.4 Summary

The two researches complement one another. Similar behaviour patterns can be detected on both; All of the participants had a profile with the social media giant Facebook and that was proven to be the most important channel to most, both Canadian and Finnish participants seemed to use social media more in the PM, and almost all of the participants on both react to something on daily basis. The age of the participant did not seem to have any effect on how they behave on social media.

Similarities on behaviour patterns can also be recognized when it comes to liking and following or unliking and unfollowing a page on social media. Both Canadian and Finnish participants seemed to agree that the page has to be able to provide something new or interesting to them in order to like or follow it. In order for the participants on both countries to unfollow or unlike a page, the page would have to publish boring content or share/post something discriminatory or support values that the participants do not support.

One major difference was clear between the two countries social media behaviour. While the research was unable to identify the feelings of Canadian brides' towards wedding hashtags, the writer of this thesis confirmed during her internship that they are in fact popular in Canada. Meanwhile the Finnish brides' who took part in the research seemed not so keen on having a wedding hashtag.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

It has been established that social media is the modern version of word of mouth. Every single person will look through some sort of reviews online when buying basically anything bigger than a notebook. With social media ruling the marketing world, buyers are now more aware and better informed when making purchase decisions.

When it comes to social media profiles, it was concluded that AOC should decide the channels to focus on and delete the rest of their profiles. The research confirmed that Instagram, Pinterest and Facebook are the most important social media channel to a wedding planning company.

As large part of the target group is and most of the research participants were millennials, the importance of social media to a wedding planning business such as AOC was found exponential. Both researches shone light on the importance of the company's values. It was established that representing similar values as your followers/target group will not only keep old followers interested, but also turn followers into promoter who lead new followers to you.

As their biggest issue as a small company regarding social media are human resources and time management, they do not have the time to keep up a professional content on all of the channels they currently have links to on their website. An incomplete or unused profile does not look professional. Furthermore, the profile links on their website do not all work correctly and should be fixed by the SEO company as soon as possible.

It was concluded in the theory that employees' posting to their personal social media outlets is important. They raise the Brand Awareness within their followers and will get the brand and company to the back of the friend's minds and when they start their wedding planning process, AOC will be the first one in their minds. The friends remember that their childhood friend has posted something about doing wedding and they will check their friend's social media first. If the employee has posted something, their social media will lead the potential customers straight to the AOC's website. AOC should encourage their employees, volunteers, interns and season workers to post about the weddings they have helped build, if the bride and groom have not denied it, but at the same time it should remind them that oversharing is never a good thing and makes the company look questionable. It is important to remember to ask for permission before posting a picture anywhere.

As mentioned earlier, AOC's biggest challenges when it comes to social media are human resources and time management. Sometimes during a wedding or other event, there is no time to stop and take pictures. However, the research confirmed that a company cannot succeed in such creative business without a successful social media presence. AOC should keep that in mind during the events and when posting something online.

4.1 Process and Project Planning

The thesis process started with discussing a possible topic late 2015. It became a reality in March 2016, with the subject analysis. The process was delayed from the original scheduling in April due to the fact that the writer had to relocate back to Finland. The first meeting with the thesis supervisor was held in late April. The theoretical framework was done by mid-August and the interviews were all conducted in late August. The strategy was written during the fall and finalized in November.

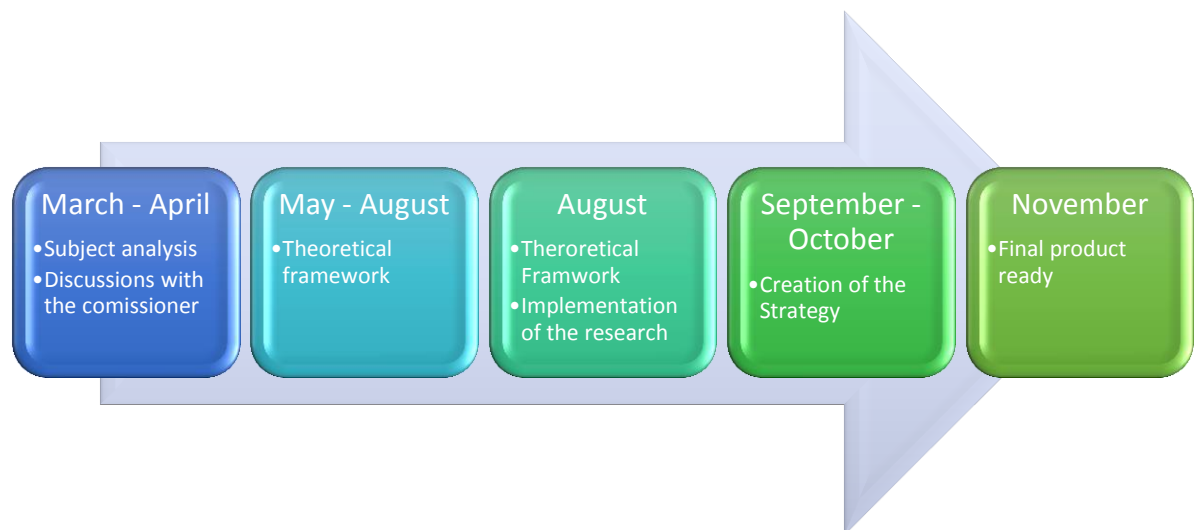


Figure 11 Timeline of the Process

4.2 Reflection on Learning

When discussing the possible topics, social media was constantly on my mind. Having worked for AOC for a while I noticed that while they use social media constantly, it could be improved with a concrete strategy. Some other ideas were bounced around, but both the commissioner and I agreed that social media is crucial to a business in the wedding industry and that it could always be improved.

The initial plan was for me to take charge of AOC's social media channels and to start monitoring the follower behaviour patterns from there. I would have done a qualitative research with the clients on AOC in Canada. This plan failed when I had to move back to Finland in the beginning of April.

I came back to Finland slightly lost regarding the thesis as I was now at a loss of research method. During a discussion with my thesis supervisor, the idea of benchmarking was discussed, but it was decided that a qualitative research with a Finnish brides' focusing on their behaviour on social media was the right approach. These answers were later validated with a small questionnaire about Canadians' social media behaviour, sent from the commissioner's personal Facebook profile in order to reach Canadian participants.

I noticed that I struggled with the Theoretical Framework as assessing AOC's social media profiles' often led me to my personal social media feeds. The main concern was time management as there was no set timeline to the process itself.

It was empowering to notice that my initial thoughts on how to improve AOC's social media were all backed up either in the theoretical framework or confirmed during the interviews. Nonetheless, I did learn a great deal about social media behaviour and SMM.

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Appendices



Social Media Marketing Strategy 2016

Objectives:

Build brand awareness and brand recognition

Help differentiate commissioning company from competitors

Increase interaction with target audience online

Turn customers into promoters

Niche market:

Couples of all ages, races, religions and sexes planning their wedding, people planning parties and other events in general, PR companies in need of help regarding event design or concept planning

Implementation:

Use of social media on daily basis

Maintaining customer relationships online

Overall recommendations and ideas:

- AOC should concentrate their efforts into a few channels and delete the profiles' they do not have time to update
- By changing the descriptions on the social media profiles' to be from the company's point of view and deleting the owner's name from the descriptions completely, AOC presents itself more as a global brand, as a brand with a mission and purpose
- Encourage employees, interns and volunteers to share visuals of the events they have been a part of, while acting professional and keeping in mind protection of personal data
- Monitor follower reactions in order to post relevant content
- AOC should get active in the blogging sphere
 - Update frequency: 1-2 posts every month
 - Post about unique weddings
 - Ask an enthusiastic bride to contribute by writing about the experience working with AOC
 - Include keywords in order to get noticed by search engine's
 - Share the link on to a new post on social media channels

Risk management:

- Beware of posting anything controversial
- Check copyrights before posting anything
- Keep passwords safe
- Keep in mind protection of personal data
- Do not post too much
- Observe and reflect on comments about the company
- Take care of customer relationships online

Overcoming time management challenges:

- Designate one employee to post on social media during the event
- Designate one employee to take pictures during the event for later use
- Schedule all posts ahead and stick to the plan

Social Media Channels



Instagram

As Instagram is the most important channel for reaching new customers and keeping former customers connected and interested, it should be the most frequently used.

Update frequency: 4-6 posts every week, 4-5 stories every week

Recommendations:

- Make the profile into a company profile
- Change the name on the profile from the owner's name to Art of Celebrations
- Change the bio from the owner's perspective to the company's perspective (E.g. the slogan of AOC "Unparalleled Events, Happy Couples")
- Start using Instagram stories
 - Post about the daily activities of wedding planner/assistants (boomerang/video of a centrepiece being made, centrepieces ready in the fridge waiting an event, visiting interesting wholesalers, picking out new vases, putting together candelabras etc.)
 - Post behind the scenes footage during the event/wedding (Loading/offloading the truck, setting up a head table, interesting details about the place settings/cake table/seating chart, close ups on the centrepieces etc.)
- Post frequently, yet beware of being repetitive, make sure no two back to back pictures look the same, do not post the same picture more than once
- Beware of using too many hashtags
- Every once in a while post a throwback of a wedding from the going on season or a Happy Anniversary message to a couple a few years back



Pinterest

Update frequency: 1-3 new posts every week

Recommendations:

- Get active
- Change the name on the profile to Art of Celebrations
- Change the address to AOC's address
- Post only own, yet high pixel pictures
- Watermark all of the pictures before posting to ensure copyright
- Focus on inspiring people
 - Visuals of details
 - If possible, post DIY tips
 - Create different boards on specific topics (such as table settings, flower arrangements, themes etc.)



Facebook

Update frequency: 2-3 posts every week

Recommendations:

- Delete the other AOC Facebook page
- Change the profile photo into something recognisable, preferably the company logo
- Post company news
- Post content made just for Facebook
- Share industry news
- Share blog posts
- Share special/unique Instagram posts, without the hashtags
- Answer to comments and messages as soon as possible
- Get to know Facebook Insights
- Ask for customer reviews on the Facebook page

Example Weekly Schedule:

As AOC's events happen mostly between Friday and Sunday, most weeks follow the same pattern. It is important to stay active every day on different platforms and while time management is an issue in small company, it can be eased by planning the posts ahead and setting a schedule.

Day of the Week	Social Media Channel	Subject suggestion	Time needed
Monday	Facebook Instagram	Company news, picture of the past week's event	10min
Tuesday	Instagram	Picture of a past event	10min
Wednesday	Pinterest Facebook	Pictures from the past week's events	1h
Thursday	Instagram	Picture/short video clip about last weekend's event	15min
Friday	Instagram Pinterest	Instagram Story and picture about event preparations	One employee to stay active during the day
Saturday	Instagram	Boomerang of arrangement being set up/off-loading the truck, Instagram Story about the set up and the event	One employee to stay active most of the day
Sunday	Instagram, if in an event/wedding	Instagram Story about behind the scenes in a wedding	One employee to stay active most of the day, if in an event/wedding